Effective Practices in Teaching Writing in NZ Secondary Schools

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NZATE
New Zealand Association
for the Teaching of English

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Effective Practices in Teaching Writing in NZ Secondary Schools
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Contents

Foreword

NZATE are pleased to be able to offer this volume as the first of a planned series of 'Effective Practice' guides which will reflect current research and practice in the teaching of English. We have been planning this series for a while now and this resource has been in production for the last two years. We decided that we would begin with the effective teaching of writing as our first focus, as we are aware that this is an aspect of the teaching of English that we all recognise as central to our work as teachers, and is also one that we are continually challenged by as we work to improve both our own practice and the achievement of our students. We have been fortunate indeed to be able to draw on the research that Shaun Hawthorne completed on the effective teaching of writing for his doctorate.

The teaching of writing is an important aspect of the English curriculum and there exists a wide range of practice around both the teaching and assessment of writing in New Zealand schools. Our hope is that this resource becomes a useful adjunct to reflection within school English departments about how writing will be taught. The publication of this resource has been deliberately timed to match the release of the new aligned standards and the guidelines about conditions of assessment. This volume is designed to be complementary to best assessment practice and we anticipate that this resource will prove a helpful guide as teachers consider their practice and the place of writing in English programmes.

We would like to acknowledge the hard work of a wide range of educators who have been involved in the production of this resource. It has proved to be a more consuming project than we expected, but we are very pleased with the results and we are grateful to the many people who have contributed to this resource.

Leanne Webb

President, NZATE

Acknowledgements

In writing this resource I would like to acknowledge the help, advice and support from many different people.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the NZATE National Council who first agreed to back the writing of this resource and the production of the DVD to accompany it. The council has invested a substantial amount of money to produce this resource and have been very supportive of the time necessary to do, what we hope is a 'good job' in producing this resource. Council members also proof-read sections of the book and gave feedback on the direction and scope of the project.

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Introduction

resources commissioned by NZATE that seeks to synthesise, into an accessible form, what we believe is 'effective practice' in the teaching of the core aspects of the English curriculum. Effective Practices in Teaching Writing is the topic chosen as the focus for the first resource because we believe the teaching of writing is an area that has been without much support or guidance for a number of years. It is also timely because in the last few years several significant reviews of the research into writing instruction have been published. These reviews give clear pointers to the most effective ways of teaching writing both within the context of English teaching and within content areas. Recently, also, reports into where New Zealand students are 'at' in terms of writing skills have been published and they paint a picture that says, "we need to do better" in teaching writing (Ministry of Education, 2006).

Writing remains a crucial skill in our society and people are expected to be able to write well in a range of genres, for a variety of purposes, but there is evidence that supports a feeling of disquiet about the writing attainment of high school-age students. In New Zealand the In Focus: Student Outcome Overview 2001-2005 kit prepared by the Ministry of Education (2006) reports on analyses of the writing achievement of students from Years 5 to 12, and concludes that "the writing skills of many secondary school students are no better than that of many primary school students" (Ministry of Education, 2006). These results are of concern because students need to be able to express their thoughts and knowledge effectively in writing if they are to participate actively in modern society. If they are not able to write well, young people may find themselves unable to engage fully with a society that requires proficiency in many written forms and text types. This is important not only in cognitive development, but it is also necessary if we are to prevent these students becoming - and indeed in many cases remaining - economically, socially, and politically disenfranchised.

Since the advent of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) and all of the attention that we, as teachers, have had to give to our assessment practices, we have to some extent lost sight of the importance of the 'teaching and learning' that takes place in our classrooms. We have all heard the cry that our programs have been 'assessment driven' since the rolling out of the NCEA, and NZATE feels that with the implementation of the new curriculum it is timely for us to refocus on the 'teaching' aspect of our job.

Purpose of the resource

The purpose of this resource is to provide teachers of English with a description of recent findings about the most effective

ways of teaching writing at secondary school level and to show how these can be embedded into our teaching. A series of principles and key practices underpinning effective teaching of writing that NZATE believes encapsulate the key ideas have been developed as a framework for this resource. The resource is intended to be used, alongside the DVD *Effective Practices in Teaching Writing*, to help teachers and departments reflect on their current practices in teaching writing and to provide guidance about how these evidence-based practices can be developed to improve the writing outcomes of our students.

What do we mean by 'effective practice?'

To begin, the term effective practice refers to practices that have been shown, by reliable research studies, to improve writing outcomes for a range of students. In using this term we are not trying to suggest that all students will respond equally well to all approaches, or that there is a 'recipe' of approaches that will guarantee success for all students. What we want to signal is that there is real evidence that a variety of approaches can be used selectively by teachers to meet the differing needs of their writing curriculum and the students in front of them.

Readers should be aware that most of the evidence referred to in this resource comes from research conducted overseas (mainly from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, or Australia) because writing has been under-researched within New Zealand schools. However, NZATE believes the New Zealand-based research that does exist also supports these overseas findings and is confident that the findings reported here, and the principles and practices that we have derived from them, are applicable to the New Zealand school setting.

Key principles

English teachers can help their students by teaching writing in ways that are shown to be effective and NZATE believes that English teachers, as professionals, need to have an understanding of the research and theory behind effective pedagogy if they are to improve their teaching practice. English teachers must make an effort to remain cognizant of the 'state-of-the-art' of our particular curriculum specialty – not only in terms of the latest findings with regard to content and assessment, but also in terms of the best pedagogies for teaching our learning area. In New Zealand, with the recent publication of the new curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2007) and the Best Evidence Syntheses[1] by the Ministry of Education, the use of 'evidence-based practices' are being very strongly advocated. For example, the inclusion of the 'teacher-inquiry' approach to effective pedagogy (Ministry of Educa-

tion, 2007) within the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) points the way forward for teachers, reinforcing that we should be looking for evidence of effective teaching approaches to inform and guide our practice.

The principles outlined below are the beliefs or assumptions that NZATE think underpin the effective teaching and learning of writing to secondary school-aged students:

- that writing is an essential skill that students need if they are to participate meaningfully and successfully in the modern world
- that what English teachers do makes a difference to how well students learn to write
- that all students are able to improve their writing
- that students learn best in a supportive and nurturing environment
- that students' own interests, backgrounds, and goals are important to acknowledge and include in writing programmes
- that knowledge and skill in reading, writing and oracy are linked

The structure of this book

We begin the book by looking back at how the teaching of writing in secondary schools has evolved and changed over the last few decades of the 20th century, and then briefly describing what writing looks like in the first decade of the 21st century. We then summarise the main findings that have been reported in recent reviews of research into writing instruction and outline the most effective teaching and assessment practices to have emerged from this body of work. Next, we discuss how these findings of effective principles and practices can be linked to the aspects of effective pedagogy outlined in the New Zealand Curriculum document. We go on to show how the key principles and practices we believe underpin effective teaching of writing are demonstrated in examples of classroom teaching exemplified in the accompanying DVD resource. Finally, the appendices of the book include a summary of the effective practices mentioned in the resource and a couple of examples of specific approaches to providing strategy instruction and feedback to students.

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[1] The Best Evidence Synthesis project, run by the New Zealand Ministry of Education, has published several syntheses that focus on how schools and teachers can better improve the outcomes for students. These are available on the Ministry website http://www.education counts.govt.nz/publications/series/2515

A brief history of teaching writing in New Zealand secondary schools

Pre-1970

Before the 1970s the traditional way of teaching writing tended to emphasise the mechanics of writing (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) and privileged a very small number of writing genres like expository essays, narratives, and report writing. In this approach students were required to do a lot of drills aimed at improving control of mechanics and were given models of the privileged forms of writing to read, comprehend, and emulate. Students were provided with opportunities to write in these forms – usually in the context of individual assignments and tests – to develop their skills and to show their level of competence. Feedback was often limited to receiving a grade for the writing and any other feedback focused much more on the level of accuracy in the use of writing conventions than on the shaping and development of ideas. These approaches focused almost exclusively on the product of the writing rather than the processes involved to produce the text (Smith, 1997). Another way of looking at these traditional approaches to teaching writing was that they either focused on the skills required in accurate writing or on responding to what were perceived to be important cultural or heritage examples of literature, i.e. the literary canon (Dixon, 1975)

Personal Growth Model of Teaching English

An important change occurred in the teaching of writing after what came to be called the 'Dartmouth Conference' in 1966. This conference brought together approximately 50 British and American scholars and teachers of English with the express purpose of examining what good English teaching should be about. The consensus that emerged from this landmark conference contributed to a 'personal growth' model of English teaching in British schools that advocated moving from a traditional 'transmission' style of teaching to one that focused on the individual learner's needs and interests and stated that the primary purpose of language was to "share experience" (Dixon, 1975). This approach de-emphasised the need to be 'accurate' or to follow particular rules and forms of writing in favour of building self-confidence and belief in oneself as a user of language. The approach had an 'operational' view of language development that emphasised the importance of personally relevant and worthwhile uses of language.

Product to Process – 1970s onwards

The shift from 'product' to 'process' that began in the 1970s and had a focus on personal growth resulted in the pedagogical movement known as 'process writing' that was influential in a lot of the teaching practices of New Zealand secondary school English teachers. There were several influential teachers/researchers associ-

ated with this movement, most notably Donald Graves who has become almost synonymous with the term process writing (Smith, 1997). Graves' main thrust was that children are intrinsically motivated to write and that they need to be nurtured and supported in their writing process (Graves, 2003). Two of Graves' main pedagogical contributions were the idea of the 'writing conference' where the teacher talks with the student about his/her writing and his/her goals for the writing; the second was the idea of publishing student writing so that students could see their work being read by a wider audience than just the teacher. However, other very important teachers and researchers like James Britton, Nancy Martin, James Moffet, Harold Rosen, and Janet Emig also placed an increasing emphasis on the processes involved in writing and wrote books and papers that helped to shape this shift in pedagogy (Emig, 1977; Britton, 1975).

The ideas of Britton et al are also very much behind the way the 1994 New Zealand English Curriculum (NZEC) document was framed (Ministry of Education, 1994).[2] For example, the three modes of transactional, expressive, and poetic writing first articulated by Britton et al (Britton, 1975 p. 88-91) were adopted by Margaret Bendall's team when they wrote the NZEC document. NZATE also advocated for the importance of teaching students about the processes involved in writing in the 1990s and published a

'position statement' to this effect in May 1989 (New Zealand Association of Teachers of English, 1989). This statement says:

> We can teach students to write more effectively by encouraging them to make full use of the many activities that comprise the act of writing, not by focusing only on the final product and its strengths and weaknesses

and:

> Guidance in the writing process … should be the central means of writing instruction. (NZATE, 1989, p. 9-10)

The New Zealand Writing Project

In New Zealand schools the process approach to teaching writing is still likely to be the single most dominant one. Indeed, the process approach to teaching writing largely underpins the New Zealand Ministry of Education publication Dancing with the Pen published in 1992, which aimed to give teachers guidance about effective ways of teaching writing. The most significant event, however, that occurred in the teaching of writing in New Zealand was probably the visit to New Zealand of Ruie Pritchard in 1988 and the establishment of the New Zealand Writing Project. Pritchard was invited here on a scholarship and she went through the country running

Review of effective practices in teaching writing to high school students

To be an effective writer, it is important that a student has knowledge and control of several different areas shown to affect the quality of writing, including knowledge of: grammar and syntax, audience and purpose, form and style, and strategies that help manage the writing process. This means that a teacher of writing has to be able to help students to improve, or grow, in their capabilities with each of these aspects. As teachers of English we all have a good control and knowledge of each of these areas ourselves, but what do we do to help our students? We generally know what types of knowledge and skills we need to develop to make students better writers, but exactly how do we do this effectively?

This section presents a synthesis of the findings of some of the most significant studies and/or reviews into effective practices in teaching writing to adolescent-aged students completed within the last decade. Under each aspect of effective practice we have identified from these studies, we will discuss the findings that provide the evidence for our belief in the effectiveness of each particular practice.

As a result of our review into effective practices in the teaching of writing, NZATE has concluded that there are two overarching aspects that teachers need to be aware of if they are to be effective teachers of writing. Firstly, there is the 'what' aspect. This is, essentially, to do with the types of knowledge and skills students need to be confident and able writers. Secondly, there is the 'how' aspect. This is the particular approach teachers use to develop any or all of the types of knowledge and skills that students need.

What knowledge and skills do student writers need to develop?

Genre knowledge

This involves developing student knowledge and understanding of the key characteristics of distinct text types or forms that they will encounter in their schooling and lives, and that they need to be able to reproduce in order to succeed in the 21st century. It also involves knowing when and how to apply this knowledge to communicate effectively for particular audiences and purposes. As has already been discussed in the section on genre-based pedagogy, there is very good evidence that explicitly teaching genre is an effective and necessary activity for teachers of writing (Cope, 1993; Derewianka, 1990; Donovan, 2006; Hicks, 1997; Rose, 2009; Rowe, 2008).

Explicitly teaching students the organisational and linguistic features of particular genres is important if students are to produce writing in those genres. It is not enough to hope that students will absorb the conventions and knowledge about genre merely from exposure to reading

materials in different genres. The reviews of research analysed for this synthesis show that a lack of explicit instruction about the stylistic and linguistic features of different genres, serves to reinforce attainment gaps between different socio-economic groups. The research also supports the conclusion that teaching students the features of particular genres helps students to improve the quality of their writing of those genres (Donovan, 2006; Myhill, 2008; Perin, 2007; Rose, 2009).

Although there remain a number of privileged text types and forms in the secondary school curriculum that English teachers cannot ignore, it is also very important that teachers help students develop knowledge and skills around text forms and types that resonate with students' actual interests and lives. For example, while it is very important to teach students how to write a five-paragraph persuasive or response-to-text essay to ensure their success in school, it is also important to teach students (or let them teach each other) the important genres of popular communication. Ladbrook's recent New Zealand study suggests that New Zealand English teachers are contin-

uing to favour a narrow range of traditional genre forms like novel, short story, poetry, and film in their teaching. Newer web-based texts and genres are much more rarely used by teachers and when they are used, they often serve the role of motivational devices in the support of the study of other genres, rather than as texts to be studied in their own right (Ladbrook, 2009). While it is true that many students will pick up the features that exist within the new popular genre of texting, email, blogs, wikis, etc without overt teaching in schools, it should not be assumed that all students are being exposed to or learning these new and important forms of written genres.

Strategic knowledge

This involves developing student knowledge of, and skill in using and applying, effective strategies that help them manage the many different demands of the writing process. Explicitly teaching students strategies to help them plan, draft, revise, and edit their writing is important as it helps them manage the cognitively dif-

by the results of a recent New Zealand-based study with Year 10 students, where many of the reasons students gave to explain why they preferred some topics or types of writing over others had to do with either their knowledge of the topic(s) that they were asked to write about and/or knowledge of how to write in that style of writing (Hawthorne, 2008). This seems particularly important for the most reluctant writers, who often lack both the skills in how to write in particular styles and topic knowledge. The implication for teaching is that we should endeavour to give students opportunities to write on topics that they are knowledgeable about and to teach them the topic and discourse knowledge they need to be able to do the task.

How can teachers help to improve writing outcomes?

From our review, NZATE has identified seven key practices we believe are effective in improving the writing outcomes for students:

(1)   Instruction that clearly describes the learning intentions and success criteria for each writing task students are asked to engage with

(2)   Instruction that encourages students to collaborate with peers to produce texts and to refine and develop the four key skills and knowledge

(3)   Instruction that allows for individual, goal-directed work

(4)   Instruction that makes connections across and between texts, text types, content, and students' own lives

(5)   Instruction that emphasises how writing is a process – i.e. requires students to work through the planning, drafting, and revising stages of writing

(6)   Instruction that involves students in using strategies that help them with their writing and in managing the many processes involved in producing effective pieces of writing

(7)   Feedback that is specific and mainly focused on the particular writing task and strategies/procedures that students are working on and gives clear guidance on next steps to improve

It is important to note that it is the combination and selection of a range of these different approaches to meet different needs that is significant in terms of teaching practice. Two recent studies into effective ways of teaching writing emphasise this point. Graham and Perin (2007) stated in their Writing Next report that teachers need to remain flexible in their approach to teaching writing and that different approaches may be more or less successful, depending on the needs and backgrounds of the students and context

for the writing (Graham & Perin, 2007a). Similarly, Judith Langer (2001) pointed out that the teachers of English in the Excellence in English project who 'beat the odds' taught skills and knowledge in multiple types of lessons – i.e. direct instruction, group work, inquiry learning, rehearsal, and practice of skills, etc. She concluded that it was the use of varied approaches that separated these teachers apart from the 'typical' teachers who tended to favour one main method of instruction (Langer, 2001).

Instruction that describes the learning intentions and success criteria

There have been a lot of studies in the educational research literature that show that making clear the learning intentions of a lesson or series of lessons, and the criteria that will be used to judge success (or not), has a considerable impact on student achievement. Within research on teaching writing, there is also clear evidence that making students aware of what they are supposed to be learning and how they can judge whether or not they have learned what was intended, helps raise the quality of student writing.

Judith Langer (2001) in the Excellence in English project, for example, found that the most effective teachers were explicit in explaining the purpose and relevance of the tasks the students were undertak-

ing, both in terms of what learning was intended from the tasks and in making links to assessment and the students' own individual goals. She found that tests (or assessments) were 'deconstructed' to inform curriculum and instruction, and preparation for tests was integrated into an ongoing programme of curriculum instruction. What this means is that in the best performing classes, while the teachers identified elements needed in the 'tests' the students had to sit, they also worked the skills and knowledge required into their regular curriculum instruction, often using thematic and recursive approaches, rather than teaching 'to the test' only. This approach helps to embed learning intentions into authentic tasks and contexts and to continually encourage links to why what is being learned is useful or relevant and important to the students.

Similarly, Debra Myhill, in her review into effective ways of teaching complex expression in writing (2008), also cites a study conducted by Peacock (1996) where he concludes that the use of success criteria derived from shared models of effective writing was a very useful strategy, which contributed to significant gains in the quality of student writing. In this study, Peacock describes a teaching sequence that involved students in analysing models of student work for successful features; these were then prioritised into a 'ladder of success'. This was subsequently used by other students to evaluate the success of the final

or elements of each type of writing can be developed and taught as a 'composing vocabulary' for any task.

Instruction that involves students in learning strategies which help them with their writing

Instruction that involves students in learning strategies that help them with their writing has been found, in many empirical studies into adolescent writing, to be one of the most effective types of instruction that can occur – in some cases the most effective sole technique (Graham & Perin, 2007a). Debra Myhill explains that "in essence, strategy instruction, often involving self-regulation, involves more than just teaching about aspects such as planning, revising and editing: it teaches the knowledge and skills needed to use these processes. It is about giving pupils independent and continued access to such strategies, long after the initial, explicit teaching has finished" (Myhill, 2008, p.13).

In one of the first in-depth analyses of what types of writing instruction were the most effective, George Hillocks (1987) concluded that the most effective types of instruction emphasised the procedural, or 'how to', elements involved in the writing task. In contrast, instruction that was mainly focused on declarative, or 'what to do', elements involved in the writing task had less impact on the quality of student writing. More recently the meta-analysis of effective writing instruction conducted by Graham and Perin (2007a) found that explicit strategy instruction had the greatest positive impact of any other single method of instruction on the quality of student writing. The research showed that explicit strategy instruction was especially effective for lower achieving students, but was still effective for all students. Similarly, Langer (2001) found in her in-depth qualitative Excellence in English project, that the highly effective English teachers explicitly taught, practised, and emphasised strategies for 'thinking and doing'. In contrast, the more 'typically performing' teachers rarely taught, or made explicit, the strategies that were involved in the production and deconstruction of texts.

One example of a highly effective approach to strategy instruction for writing is the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) approach developed by Steve Graham, Karen Harris and their colleagues over the last few decades (Graham, Harris & Troia, 1998). What appears to be especially significant in the SRSD approach is that teachers are explicit in their teaching of strategies that help students self-regulate their behaviour, cognition, and affect (emotions) while undertaking writing tasks. The approach emphasises enabling students by giving them the chance to memorise and practise using the strategies they are being taught as well as requiring that teachers model how and

when to use the strategies and talk about the benefits and relevance of the strategy instruction. It is also fundamental in this approach that students are given the opportunity to collaborate in adapting the strategies they are being taught. This is

important in getting students to 'own' the strategy and to apply it to their writing and it also encourages them to make links with other types of writing so that they can 'transfer' what they learn from this strategy to a different but similar writing task (Graham & Harris, 2005).

Although most of the research into the effectiveness of strategy instruction has focussed on the processes for writing like planning, drafting and revising, Myhill (2008) has theorised that the same principles apply in the teaching of more complex expression in writing. She says that strategy instruction "might be formulated to teach secondary writers how to consider options for sentence structure, or how to use oral rehearsal/mental reading aloud

to 'hear' how the writing sounds" (p. 17). In her review of effective strategies for teaching complex expression, Myhill goes on to suggest some different examples of how strategy instruction could be used to improve the complexity of students' use of sentence structures and expression. For instance, students could be taught strategies in how to work collaboratively with peers to evaluate the effectiveness of their sentences or explicitly shown how to re-read their work during writing as a way of drawing attention to sentence design and word choice during the writing process (Myhill, 2008).

In summary, explicit strategy instruction is important because it emphasises the cognitive processes involved in writing and it makes students aware of all of the 'thinking' that is involved in writing. Because strategy instruction is focused on the 'how' of writing, this approach also encourages students to transfer what they learn in one context and apply it to another (Graham & Perin, 2007b). Given the fact that different writers write in different ways, and may need different levels of help and support with different stages or aspects of the writing process, any discussion that teachers can generate about writing strategies and how they may be useful for different types of writing may help to limit either a linear approach to writing instruction or at least lessen the 'one-size-fits-all' approach (Myhill, 2008).

(3) Time is not always given for students to process the feedback. When time is provided – especially time for a clear reflection process – students are far more likely to process and use teacher feedback

(4) When seeking improvement, students initially tend to work at a surface or superficial level instead of at a deeper level, diagnosing and crafting a revision based on meaning and understanding

(5) Teacher comment can be vague – for example: "give more depth"

(6) The feedback itself may be appropriate, but the way in which it is communicated – or factors such as timing, mood, or student receptivity – can affect how it is processed

In summary, feedback is central to the development of writing in English classrooms and represents hours of teacher time. It is in the interests of both teachers and learners that the feedback given is as effective as possible and that learners make maximum use of teacher (and peer) input to improve their writing. In their extensive study, Black and Wiliam (2004) noted that "all came to understand that it was worthwhile putting in the effort to work with feedback through comments because they could sense that learning was improving. These comments provided the vehicle for personal dialogue with each learner about his or her work to which the learner could respond" (p. 30). In developing a feedback process, a teacher can use the above characteristics as a guide and the issues as a check.

Effective practices in assessment of writing

The assessment of writing remains a problematic practice for teachers and deserves some discussion in a resource about effective practices in teaching writing. In New Zealand, as in many other countries, the debate around assessment centres on the two key ideas of reliability and validity. Essentially the idea of reliability refers to the 'reproducibility' of a test's results. As Heu-

bert and Hauser (1999) explain, "a test is highly reliable if a student taking it on two different occasions will get two very similar if not identical scores" (p. 71). In contrast the key issue of validity according to Heubert and Hauser (1999), "is to determine… whether the test measures what it purports to measure and what meaning can be drawn from the results" (p. 71-72). Not surprisingly, some of the more 'reliable' methods of assessment like multiple-choice tests identifying spelling, grammar and punctuation problems in writing samples are not regarded as very 'valid' ways of assessing a students' actual ability to compose a coherent piece of writing. In writing assessment there is always going to be tension between obtaining reliable results that are also valid, and valid results that are also reliable. This tension necessitates trying to find an approach that balances the need for reliability with the need for validity and has led to an extensive body of research.

Numerous studies have been conducted over the years into the validity, reliability and accuracy of marking students' writing without definitive conclusions being reached as to their being any one 'best' approach (Calfee & Miller, 2007; Gearhart, 2009; Hayes, Hatch, & Silk, 2000; Hillocks, 2002, 2006; Huot, 1990; Huot & Neal, 2006; Marshall, 2001; Murphy & Yancey, 2008; Tchudi, 1997; Weigle, 2002). Indeed, it seems that the 'best' approach depends on the purpose

of the assessment. Despite the lack of any definitive answer, however, NZATE would agree with Calfee & Miller (2007) that "best practices in writing assessment begin with an authentic task, where purpose and audience are clear and meaningful, where support and feedback are readily available, and where the final product has academic value for the student" (p. 269). Given this general principle we acknowledge that the purpose of the assessment will, inevitably, change the type of assessment conducted. For example, in large scale national assessments where giving grades that compare students against a set standard and/or each other is the main purpose, the reliability of the scoring mechanism becomes the most dominant consideration, as well as how quick and easy it is to check and administer. For the assessment of writing within one teacher's class, however, the validity of the assessment usually becomes more significant and this changes what teachers do and what they regard as the most important aspect of the assessment.

Scales used for scoring writing

One important area of writing assessment research has focused on trying to find the best ways to 'score' students' writing. Over time, different methods have been tried and tested for their reliability, in terms of how likely it is that one teacher's rating of a piece of writing will be the same as another teacher's for the same piece of writing. Today there are three types of

of writing tasks and also decrease 'authenticity', by setting short and controlled time constraints on the production of writing and by putting constraints on the extent to which students can discuss and collaborate with one another in the production of texts. The effect of qualifications on student writing needs to be further examined in New Zealand, but George Hillocks' (2002) study into the effect of state testing on student writing in the USA paints a picture that is likely to be replicated here. In the study, Hillocks found some positive outcomes of the state testing were increases in the amount of time students spent on writing 'extended' pieces, increased use of pre-writing activities, greater attention to audience and purpose, and more explicit preparation and teaching of writing skills needed for these assessments. On the negative side, the variety of writing tasks being attempted by students was limited (i.e. students were writing various versions of the five-paragraph model over and over again), teachers were preparing students for tests rather than teaching them skills that would transfer more widely to other contexts, and the preparation for tests also limited the amount of time students were involved in collaborative writing activities for authentic purposes (Hillocks, 2002).

The juggling of different demands on teachers makes the effective teaching of writing a difficult, complex, but also fascinating endeavour. We hope this review is useful to English teachers not only in being able to affirm the things they are currently doing that research evidence shows makes a difference, but also to draw attention to effective approaches that they may not currently be utilising.

Links to the new curriculum

One of the things that is notable from the Review of effective practices in teaching writing section is the extent to which the practices that were identified from the review match the elements of effective pedagogy described in the New Zealand Curriculum document. The curriculum document states that students learn best when teachers:

• Create a supportive learning environment
• Encourage reflective thought and action
• Enhance the relevance of new learning
• Facilitate shared learning
• Make connections to prior learning and experience
• Provide sufficient opportunities to learn
• Inquire into the teaching-learning relationship

Each of these elements has been embedded within the effective practices discussed previously. This section will make links between the principles and examples of effective practice in teaching writing and the

elements of effective pedagogy pinpointed in the curriculum.

Create a supportive learning environment

Students learn best when they feel that they are accepted, when they have positive relationships with their classmates and with their teacher and when they are able to participate fully in the learning environment of the classroom (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34).

A supportive writing classroom is one in which the teacher fosters an environment that values writing and encourages students to be involved in the writing process. Students will feel supported in each of the steps involved in writing and the teacher will be conscious of where each student is up to with their writing and what support they may need to move to the next level or stage in their writing. Examples of student (and other) writing would be visible in work displayed in the room and there will be opportunities for students to publish their work. In addition, the students would have a considerable degree of choice as to the form and content of much of their writing tasks so that their interests and strengths in writing are being acknowledged. Students would also be encouraged to challenge themselves with their writing and to explore new forms and genres. Where possible the teacher would try to encourage and find authentic

writing experiences for the students to be involved in, so the value and purpose of good writing is clear. Finally, the effective teacher of writing will create a learning environment that responds to the diversity of interests, backgrounds, and skill levels of the students in the class and enables them to be appropriately challenged and supported to improve their writing.

Encourage reflective thought and action

Students learn most effectively when they develop the ability to stand back from the information or ideas that they have been engaged with and think about these objectively (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 34).

In the writing classroom, effective teachers will encourage students to think carefully about the decisions and strategies that they are using as they are involved in writing. Teachers will be involved in the explicit teaching of meta-cognition and self-regulation strategies that encourage students to be conscious of the steps and processes that they are involved in as they write. Teachers will also be involved in modelling how to reflect on writing and will scaffold students through tasks as they develop their abilities and skills of thinking about the many different choices and decisions they make as they compose.

Enhance the relevance of new learning

Classroom Examples of the Effective Teacher Practices

"Making students aware of what they are supposed to be learning… helps raise the quality of student writing"

Effective Practice #1

Instruction that describes the learning intentions and success criteria

"There is considerable evidence that students who understand learning goals and either receive or self-generate feedback about their progress in reaching them are more successful learners than those who do not."

Parr, Timperley, Reddish, Jesson, Adams, (2007, p. 83)

What does this mean?

Describing to students what the learning intentions and success criteria are for their writing involves getting them to understand exactly what it is they have to do to succeed. It also helps students to focus on what you think are the most important aspects of your lesson and/or the task that you are working on in class.

Making students aware of what they are supposed to be learning, and how they can judge whether or not they have learned what was intended, helps raise the quality of student writing.

Effective teachers of writing need to be explicit in explaining the purpose and relevance of the tasks that they are getting the students to undertake. This means not only being explicit in terms of what learning was intended from the tasks, but also

being explicit in making links to assessment and the students' individual learning goals.

It is also important to not only identify the elements needed in the assessments the students have to do, but to attempt to work the skills and knowledge required for these assessments into ongoing, regular teaching. Using thematic approaches in unit planning is one effective approach to build core skills and concepts into a unit in an 'authentic' way. This allows teachers to keep revisiting the key ideas repeatedly during a lesson/unit so that they are continually able to reinforce the learning intentions and success criteria and to check on where the students 'are at' in terms of these key skills.

An example of this kind of practice that is widespread in secondary school English classrooms is where instruction focuses

on 'unpacking' the achievement criteria and marking schedules used for assessing writing. Similarly, the study of exemplars to show what 'success' looks like from real student examples of work is another effective strategy.

The exploration of models of student work is useful because it draws attention to what other writers have done and if used skilfully, models can make students aware of both what works well and what works less well.

Some Classroom Examples

In the DVD accompanying this book there are several classroom examples that show teachers being explicit in their learning intentions and involving the students in activities that enable them to understand what is needed for 'success' with the task.

For example, in Daniel's Year 9 class he is very clear with the students about what they are learning in each lesson. He uses the acronym WALT (We are learning to…) as a regular format in his lessons to highlight with the students what his learning intentions are for each task or activity he is engaged in.

In another example from the DVD, Jess's Year 11 class analyse some published examples of student writing together and then form their own list of 'success criteria' that they determine are needed to write

a good piece of descriptive writing. This process encourages the students to articulate in their own words what is needed to be successful in the writing task they have been given.

Similarly, Marie's Year 12 class undertake an analysis of a piece of writing describing an experience of Christmas that the author has had. In the lesson the students identify the different things that the author has done to show how they felt about this particular Christmas. This enabled students to see that successful reflective writing includes lots of concrete details and emotive language, among other characteristics. This then helped them to make connections to the writing task that that they were moving on to, which was to describe a holiday experience of their own.

We also see in Lynda's Junior English class how effectively she incorporates learning intentions and success criteria in her poetry writing unit. For example, at one point

in the DVD we see her working with the students in her class to derive a 'checklist' of criteria that they use to help them with their writing. Lynda refers to this checklist several times during the lesson and at the end and the students also use the success criteria they came up with to evaluate each other's work and decide on the 'best' poem from the people in their group.

Some other activities that work

Teachers…

- Make explicit links between prior knowledge about writing with the learning aims of the lesson several times during a lesson
- Involve students in making links between what they already know and what is needed to succeed in the task they have been given
- Involve students in analysing successful exemplars of writing to identify their own criteria for what you need to do to succeed
- Finding ways of checking that students' understanding of learning intentions and success criteria is accurate and addressing any misunderstandings
- Using success criteria derived from analysing students own work in making peer responses/judgments about the quality of each others' writing

What doesn't work

Teachers…

- Merely writing learning intentions on the board without discussing them or linking them to students' prior knowledge
- Writing learning intentions in the form of 'tasks' rather than in terms of what the 'skills' or 'concepts' are that the students are learning
- Not being explicit about what their learning aims are or what students have to do to achieve success with a task/activity

Appendices

Appendix One: A Self-Regulation Strategy Approach to Teaching a Response to Text Essay to Year 9/10 students

Devised by Shaun Hawthorne using the SRSD approach developed by Steve Graham and Karen Harris

NB: It is assumed that you have already done the teaching of the text and the aspects of the text that you want students to write about prior to this point.

Lesson One: Develop background knowledge and discuss strategy

Set the context for student learning

Tell the students they are going to be learning a new trick/strategy to help them write 'response to text' essays. Tell them this trick/strategy has been proven to improve the writing of students of all abilities. **Explain that you are interested in them learning the strategy and *how they apply it in their own essays.*** Explain that you are also interested in what they think of the strategy and how the strategy might be improved to be even better.

Develop the strategy and self-regulation

Step One: Develop background knowledge (of the writing purpose)

Check that they know what a response to text essay is, e.g. "A response to text essay is an essay where you write about a particular aspect of a text that you have studied and show your knowledge and understanding of this aspect and why it is important or interesting."

You may also want to check what they think about their ability to write such essays. Have they done this type of essay before? How did they go? What do they remember about this type of essay?

This could be done as a whole class or in groups or pairs. Think about what approach

would involve the students the most. You may want to do a combination, i.e. groups discuss these questions first then share group ideas with the rest of the class.
It is important to address any negative ideas/beliefs students may have about essay writing. Project a positive belief about the benefits that learning this strategy will have on their essay writing, e.g.

> A lot of you have said that you don't like essays and that you're no good at them. I just want you to know that I've taught this strategy several (lots of) times before and the students in my classes really notice how it improves their essays.

Basically, project the idea that the trick/strategy really works and will make a difference to the quality of their essays and how easy they find writing the essay.

Link to prior knowledge:

You may want to ask the students what they know about essay writing and other types of essays that may link to this type of writing – make links between this type of essay and how it is similar or different to formal writing, opinion essays or other types of writing.

Describe and discuss what makes a good response to text essay – e.g. a good response to text essay:

- has a clear introduction that lets the reader know what text they are writing about and how they are going to address the topic/question in their essay
- focuses on the one aspect that the question/topic is asking them to write about makes two or three points about this aspect
- contains specific details, quotes, or references from the text to support each point
- makes clear statements explaining how each point/example links back to the topic and addresses the question

Explain the purpose of the essay skill that they are developing

Talk about when you would write this type of essay and why learning how to write this type of essay is important or useful (e.g. for exams or assessment, improving thinking skills, drawing attention to important aspects of texts).

Appendix Three: A summary of effective strategies suggested in the review

Adapted from "Effective Practices in Teaching Complex Expression in Writing"
by Debra Myhill, (2008 pp 94-97)

The suggested strategies listed below are based on 'evidence' and attempt to make connections between the research literature and classroom practice. The strategies are not necessarily each validated by a robust intervention study, but they do exploit some of the synergies and inter-connections evident in the review between empirical studies, theoretical papers and professional literature. Many have been suggested at different points in the resource and/or are shown on the DVD but they are grouped here for convenience and to provide a useful 'checklist' of ideas for teachers.

If you want to check out this extensive and detailed review visit the url -http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR032.pdf to get a copy of the review and studies that are linked to many of the strategies suggested below.

Instruction that describes the learning intentions and success criteria

- Make explicit links between prior knowledge about writing with the learning aims of the lesson several times during a lesson
- Involve students in making links between what they already know and what is needed to succeed in the task they have been given
- Involve students in analysing successful exemplars of writing to identify their own criteria for what you need to do to succeed
- Find ways of checking that students' understanding of learning intentions and success criteria is accurate and addressing any misunderstandings
- Use success criteria derived from analysing students own work in making peer responses/judgments about the quality of each others writing
- Explicitly teach of a range of grammatical features that fulfil criteria for sophisticated, complex expression and which characterise higher band achievement

Instruction that encourages students to collaborate with peers

- Students work with small or larger groups to:
- Evaluate the effectiveness of sentences and language choices in their writing
- Analyse models of good/published writing to create success criteria for their own writing
- Provide feedback and comment on each others' writing using success criteria derived by students and teacher collaboratively
- Match higher-performing students with lower-performing students to collaborate together on the production of a piece of writing
- Discuss the impact and possibilities in relation to sentence-combining, incorporating group discussions, feedback, evaluation, reflection, and praise; using 'mistakes' as opportunities for discussion and problem solving
- Get students to write using "write aloud" protocols and then discussing what they did and how they did it with other students
- Work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions; use of collaborative writing, where pairs of pupils write together, taking it in turns to scribe the text
- Computer mediated talk may be good for focused attention on writing and writing forms
- Use 'Paired Writing' systems e.g. in which a higher achieving students acts as tutor for a lower achieving student; process assisted by metacognitive prompts
- Use response partners to judge each other's writing and suggest improvements; response partners basing judgements on criteria derived from analysis of devices used in published writers' texts and on success criteria derived from analysis of good writing from pupils' own work
- Peer partners' comment on drafts, using success criteria to make judgements and providing feedback on a 'likes and improvements' model
- Using computers can encourage collaborative writing; increase pupils' engagement and motivation in their writing; produce written work that is of greater length and higher quality

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